

In 2022, Costa Rica made moderate advancement in efforts to eliminate the worst forms of child labor. The government launched a plan to eradicate all forms of child labor in Costa Rica by 2025 and conducted virtual and in-person training to strengthen awareness, prevention, and the culture of reporting on child labor issues. The Office for the Eradication of Child Labor and Protection of the Adolescent Worker also provided assistance to minors withdrawn from exploitative labor by referring them to the cash transfer program for adolescent workers. However, children in Costa Rica are subjected to the worst forms of child labor, including in commercial sexual exploitation, sometimes as a result of human trafficking. Children also engage in child labor in agriculture, including in the production of coffee. Lastly, research indicates that Costa Rica does not have an adequate number of labor inspectors to carry out inspection duties and it lacks sufficient financial resources to be able to carry out labor and criminal enforcement efforts.



### I. PREVALENCE AND SECTORAL DISTRIBUTION OF CHILD LABOR

Table 1 provides key indicators on children's work and education in Costa Rica.

**Table 1. Statistics on Children's Work and Education**

Children	Age	Percent
Working (% and population)	5 to 14	6.5 (46,509)
Attending School (%)	5 to 14	98.4
Combining Work and School (%)	7 to 14	7.0
Primary Completion Rate (%)		104.7

Source for primary completion rate: Data from 2021, published by UNESCO Institute for Statistics, 2023. (1)

Source for all other data: International Labor Organization's analysis of statistics from Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey 6 (MICS), 2018. (2)

Based on a review of available information, Table 2 provides an overview of children's work by sector and activity.

**Table 2. Overview of Children's Work by Sector and Activity**

Sector/Industry	Activity
Agriculture	Picking coffee (3,4)
	Cattle raising, including for the production of milk (3,5,6)
	Fishing,† including shellfish extraction (6-8)
Industry	Construction, activities unknown (6)
	Manufacturing, activities unknown (6)
Services	Working in restaurants, shops, and hotels (6)
	Street vending,† car washing, and repairing motor vehicles (9)
	Domestic work (8-10)
Categorical Worst Forms of Child Labor‡	Commercial sexual exploitation, sometimes as a result of human trafficking, and use in the production of pornography (6,7,11,12)
	Forced labor in the agriculture, construction, fishing, street vending, and commercial sectors (7,13)
	Forced Domestic Labor (7,14)
	Use in transporting or selling drugs, sometimes as a result of human trafficking (8,12,15)

† Determined by national law or regulation as hazardous and, as such, relevant to Article 3(d) of ILO C. 182.

‡ Child labor understood as the worst forms of child labor *per se* under Article 3(a)–(c) of ILO C. 182.

# Costa Rica

## MODERATE ADVANCEMENT

One third of children engaged in child labor in Costa Rica work in agriculture, with the highest incidences of child labor occurring in coastal regions, in the provinces of Limon, Puntarenas, and Guanacaste. (16,17) Children, including migrant children, are also subjected to commercial sexual exploitation, particularly in tourist destinations, border areas, and in the Northern and Pacific coastal zones. (12,14,18) In addition, migrant children, typically from Nicaragua and the Dominican Republic, are subjected to forced labor in agriculture, domestic work, and commercial sexual exploitation. Migrant, indigenous, and Afro-descendant children are particularly vulnerable to labor exploitation in Costa Rica. (11,12,18)

In June 2023, the National Statistics Institute published the 2022 National Household Survey, which included data on children between the ages of 12 and 17 and found that 0.7 percent of children within this age group were working. (6) This represented an additional decline from the 1.3 percent noted in the 2021 survey. The last comprehensive child labor study that included all relevant age ranges was conducted in 2016. (6)

Although preschool and general basic education are free and compulsory, children in rural areas, girls, LGBTQI+ youth, and children from indigenous and Afro-descendant communities face barriers to education access, including discrimination and gender stereotypes. (19,20)

## II. LEGAL FRAMEWORK FOR CHILD LABOR

Costa Rica has ratified all key international conventions concerning child labor (Table 3).

**Table 3. Ratification of International Conventions on Child Labor**

Convention	Ratification
 ILO C. 138, Minimum Age	✓
ILO C. 182, Worst Forms of Child Labor	✓
 UN CRC	✓
UN CRC Optional Protocol on Armed Conflict	✓
UN CRC Optional Protocol on the Sale of Children, Child Prostitution and Child Pornography	✓
 Palermo Protocol on Trafficking in Persons	✓

The government has established laws and regulations related to child labor (Table 4). However, gaps exist in Costa Rica's legal framework to adequately protect children from the worst forms of child labor, including a lack of prohibitions related to the military recruitment of children by non-state armed groups.

**Table 4. Laws and Regulations on Child Labor**

Standard	Meets International Standards	Age	Legislation
Minimum Age for Work	Yes	15	Articles 3, 78, 92, and 101 of the Childhood and Adolescence Code (20)
Minimum Age for Hazardous Work	Yes	18	Articles 1 and 5 of Law 8922; Article 87 of the Labor Code (21,22)
Identification of Hazardous Occupations or Activities Prohibited for Children	Yes		Article 94 of the Childhood and Adolescence Code; Article 5 of Law 8922; Article 88 of the Labor Code; Articles 5 and 6 of Regulation No. 36640 (20-23)
Prohibition of Forced Labor	Yes		Law No. 9545; Articles 20 and 56 of the Constitution; Article 8 of the Labor Code; Articles 7, 170–172, 189 bis, 192, 376, 381, 383, and 384 of the Penal Code; Article 84 of Regulation No. 36659; Article 7 of the Trafficking in Persons Law (22,24-27)
Prohibition of Child Trafficking	Yes		Law No. 9545; Articles 7, 171, 172, 189 bis, 192, 381, 383, and 384 of the Penal Code; Article 6 of Regulation No. 36659; Articles 5, 7, and 74 of the Trafficking in Persons Law (24-26)

**Table 4. Laws and Regulations on Child Labor (Cont.)**

Standard	Meets International Standards	Age	Legislation
Prohibition of Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children	Yes		Articles 160, 168, and 170–174 of the Penal Code (24)
Prohibition of Using Children in Illicit Activities	Yes		Articles 7, 188, 381, and 390 of the Penal Code; Article 77 of the Narcotics Law (24,28)
Minimum Age for Voluntary State Military Recruitment	N/A†		
Prohibition of Compulsory Recruitment of Children by (State) Military	N/A†		
Prohibition of Military Recruitment by Non-state Armed Groups	No		
Compulsory Education Age	Yes	17‡	Articles 57 and 59 of the Childhood and Adolescence Code; Article 78 of the Constitution (20,27)
Free Public Education	Yes		Article 59 of the Childhood and Adolescence Code; Article 8 of the Education Law; Article 78 of the Constitution (20,27,29)

† Country has no standing military. (27)

‡ Age calculated based on available information. (20,27)

As Costa Rica's minimum age for work is lower than the compulsory education age, children may be encouraged to leave school before the completion of compulsory education. (20,27)

### III. ENFORCEMENT OF LAWS ON CHILD LABOR

The government has established institutional mechanisms for the enforcement of laws and regulations on child labor (Table 5). However, gaps exist within the operations of enforcement agencies that may hinder adequate enforcement of their child labor laws.

**Table 5. Agencies Responsible for Child Labor Law Enforcement**

Organization/Agency	Role & Activities
Ministry of Labor and Social Security (MTSS)	Monitors and enforces provisions in the Labor Code related to child labor, including by conducting school visits and worksite inspections. (20) Through the Office for the Eradication of Child Labor and Protection of the Adolescent Worker (OATIA), responds to and attempts to prevent child labor through policy development and public awareness campaigns. (30) Also provides referrals for those found to be in exploitative labor to government social services and prepares technical reports to inform policies and programs. (20)
Attorney General's Office	Enforces criminal laws protecting children, including laws prohibiting forced child labor, human trafficking, commercial sexual exploitation of children, and the use of children in illicit activities. (9,31) Coordinates efforts with the Judicial Investigative Police, the Immigration Police, the Uniformed Police, and municipal police forces. Also coordinates with other government agencies (the National Child Welfare Agency, the Social Security System, the Ministries of Education and Health, the Civil Registry, and other agencies), as well as with NGOs, international organizations, and diplomatic missions. (15)
Judicial Investigative Police	Investigate violations related to the worst forms of child labor, including child trafficking, child commercial sexual exploitation, and the use of children in illicit activities. (11)

#### **Labor Law Enforcement**

In 2022, labor law enforcement agencies in Costa Rica took actions to address child labor (Table 6). However, gaps exist within the operations of the Ministry of Labor and Social Security (MTSS) that may hinder adequate labor law enforcement, including insufficient resource allocation.

# Costa Rica

## MODERATE ADVANCEMENT

**Table 6. Labor Law Enforcement Efforts Related to Child Labor**

Overview of Labor Law Enforcement	2021	2022
Labor Inspectorate Funding	\$8,500,000 (15)	\$8,817,921 (8)
Number of Labor Inspectors	117 (15)	105 (8)
Mechanism to Assess Civil Penalties	Yes (22)	Yes (22)
Training for Labor Inspectors Provided	Yes (15)	Yes (8)
Number of Labor Inspections Conducted at Worksite	4,566 (15)	7,917 (8)
Number of Child Labor Violations Found	0 (15)	3 (8)
Number of Child Labor Violations for Which Penalties Were Imposed	Unknown	1 (6)
Number of Child Labor Penalties Imposed that Were Collected	Unknown	Unknown (8)
Routine Inspections Conducted	Yes (15)	Yes (8)
Routine Inspections Targeted	Yes (15)	Yes (8)
Unannounced Inspections Permitted	Yes (22)	Yes (22)
Unannounced Inspections Conducted	Yes (15)	Yes (8)
Complaint Mechanism Exists	Yes (15)	Yes (8)
Reciprocal Referral Mechanism Exists Between Labor Authorities and Social Services	Yes (15)	Yes (8)

As of October 2022, labor inspectors identified 37 minor workers through inspections, while OATIA identified 150 cases of minors working, including 48 cases of children under 15 years of age while the rest of the cases were of children over 15 years of age found working under hazardous conditions. (6,8) The Office for the Eradication of Child Labor and Protection of the Adolescent Worker (OATIA) also reported providing assistance to these minors, by referring them to the Joint Social Welfare Institute (IMAS) so they can benefit from the cash transfer program for adolescent workers (MTSS-IMAS Agreement). (8) Additionally, the Labor Inspection Office identified three infractions related to child labor during worksite inspections, as well as eight illegal dismissals of adolescent workers. (8) Furthermore, the Labor Inspection Office trained 23 labor inspectors on labor laws from July 20 to August 31, 2022, and OATIA trained 90 officials on the worst forms of child labor. (8) However, enforcement of child labor laws, particularly in rural areas and in the informal sector, is reportedly challenging due to insufficient funds for travel, facilities, and per diem costs incurred during inspections. (15,19,32) Informal work is more common in agriculture than in other sectors in Costa Rica. (3,15) The Labor Inspection Office has indicated that it does not have an adequate number of labor inspectors to carry out their mandated duties. (5,19,32-34)

### **Criminal Law Enforcement**

In 2022, criminal law enforcement agencies in Costa Rica took actions to eliminate child labor (Table 7). However, gaps exist within the operations of criminal enforcement agencies that may hinder adequate criminal law enforcement, including insufficient training for criminal investigators.

**Table 7. Criminal Law Enforcement Efforts Related to Child Labor**

Overview of Criminal Law Enforcement	2021	2022
Training for Criminal Investigators Provided	Yes (15)	Yes (8)
Number of Investigations	15 (15)	14† (8)
Number of Prosecutions Initiated	5 (15)	2 (8)
Number of Convictions	2 (15)	2 (8)
Imposed Penalties for Violations Related to the Worst Forms of Child Labor	Yes (15)	2 (8)
Reciprocal Referral Mechanism Exists Between Criminal Authorities and Social Services	Yes (15)	Yes (8)

† Data are from January 1, 2022, to November 30, 2022.

In 2022, the National Child Welfare Agency (PANI) reported 10 cases of human trafficking involving minor victims, including 1 case of labor exploitation, 1 case of domestic servitude, and 4 cases of commercial sexual exploitation. Additionally, as of November 2022, the National Coalition Against Migrant Smuggling and Trafficking

in Persons (CONATT) Immediate Response Team had confirmed one case of labor exploitation of a child for selling candy in San Jose, one case of domestic servitude of a minor involving a Nicaraguan victim, and one case of a minor forced to sell drugs in Limon. (8) The migration authority, in coordination with CONATT member institutions, conducted virtual and in-person training for 1,060 individuals to strengthen awareness, prevention, and the culture of reporting. According to the CONATT report, this exceeded previously identified training participation goals by 51 percent. (35) In addition, the Costa Rican Tourism Institute conducted 18 virtual and in-person workshops on the Code of Conduct for the Protection of Children and Adolescents from Commercial Sexual Exploitation related to Travel and Tourism. (35) The government also made efforts to reduce the demand for participation in international sex tourism by working with international partners through programs such as the Angel Watch Program to deny entry to 76 foreign-registered sex offenders in 2022. (6)

Reports indicate that the judiciary, prosecutors, and the police require additional staff, training, and resources to identify victims of human trafficking and commercial sexual exploitation, refer victims to appropriate social services, and investigate, prosecute, and convict perpetrators. (8, 11, 13, 15, 36) In addition, a lack of training and resources for municipal-level authorities hampered the abilities of local governments to respond to cases that could involve the worst forms of child labor. (18) Costa Rica does not have a database to track human trafficking cases, making it difficult to target enforcement and prevention efforts. (13)

#### IV. COORDINATION OF GOVERNMENT EFFORTS ON CHILD LABOR

The government has established a key mechanism to coordinate its efforts to address child labor (Table 8). However, gaps exist that hinder the effective coordination of efforts to address child labor, including a lack of sufficient resources to ensure coordination among relevant agencies.

**Table 8. Key Mechanism to Coordinate Government Efforts on Child Labor**

Coordinating Body	Role & Activities
MTSS Office for the Eradication of Child Labor and Protection of the Adolescent Worker (OATIA)	Coordinates government policies and programs to address child labor. (3) Oversees the Interinstitutional Coordinating Protocol for the Protection of Working Minors. (37) In 2022, supported MTSS in the launch of the Roadmap to Make Costa Rica a Country Free of Child Labor and Its Worst Forms 2021–2025. (8) Furthermore, it continued implementing projects in the Talamanca and Valle la Estrella areas in the territories of indigenous and African-descent within the Limon province to develop interinstitutional actions, provide direct assistance to the working minor populations, and refer them to local municipalities, education sector, and other resources that assist parents and members of the community with livelihood projects. It also benefited 130 working minors from the Huetar Caribbean region by providing conditional cash transfers of \$120 per month to individuals under 18 years of age who work in conditions of poverty or extreme poverty. (8) Additionally, during the reporting period it provided training to 232 government officials and 41 individuals from the business sector through a virtual course entitled "Let's make a difference and protect the rights of working minors!" (8)

Reports indicate that coordination is lacking among institutions responsible for investigating the worst forms of child labor and those providing social services to victims. (15) OATIA has reported that its office needs additional staff to better assist children engaged in child labor and their families. In addition, OATIA lacks adequate transportation resources, which limits its ability to provide oversight of child labor programs. (6, 31)

#### V. GOVERNMENT POLICIES ON CHILD LABOR

The government has established policies that are consistent with relevant international standards on child labor (Table 9).

# Costa Rica

## MODERATE ADVANCEMENT

**Table 9. Key Policies Related to Child Labor**

Policy	Description & Activities
Roadmap to Make Costa Rica a Country Free of Child Labor and Its Worst Forms (2021–2025)†	Launched on April 25, 2022, and aims to eradicate all forms of child labor in Costa Rica by 2025 by strengthening efforts to identify and track hazardous child labor, and by increasing social awareness and collaborative efforts to address child labor. (8,15,38)
National Policy Against Trafficking in Persons (2020–2030)	Outlines goals and actions in the area of preventing and combating human trafficking and smuggling of migrants, as well as strengthening human trafficking investigations and sanctioning criminals. (39,40) In 2022, the government continued implementing this policy. (6)
Interinstitutional Coordinating Protocol for the Protection of Working Minors	Outlines provision of services for child laborers through collaboration between MTSS, the National Child Welfare Agency (PANI), the Ministry of Public Education, and the Joint Social Welfare Institute (IMAS), as well as their regional and local agencies and the private sector. (41) Reports indicate that the government continued carrying out activities implementing this policy during the reporting period. (6)

† Policy was launched during the reporting period.

In 2022, the Ministry of Planning and Economic Policy launched the new National Development Plan 2023-2026. (8) The plan establishes seven national goals related to economic growth, public debt, unemployment, poverty, inequality, citizen security, and decarbonization. The plan also includes a section on welfare, labor, and social inclusion with elements related to child protection and addressing the root causes of child labor. (6,8)

## VI. SOCIAL PROGRAMS TO ADDRESS CHILD LABOR

In 2022, the government funded and participated in programs that include the goal of eliminating child labor (Table 10). However, gaps exist in these social programs, including the accessibility of programs to all relevant groups.

**Table 10. Key Social Programs to Address Child Labor**

Program	Description & Activities
Bridge to Development†	Aims to reduce poverty and eliminate vulnerability, including child labor, by providing social services to families in poor communities. (42,43) In 2022, the government reported the program was still active and that since its inception it had served 113,000 families. (6)
Houses of Joy ( <i>Casas de la Alegría</i> )†	Public-private initiative that seeks to protect and contribute to the development and social inclusion of children, particularly migrant and indigenous children, while their parents and relatives are working in the coffee harvest. (4,6,44) The centers offer free childcare, healthcare, meals, and social protection services and mitigate the risk of child labor on coffee plantations. (6) IMAS funds meals, caregiver salaries, and training; farm owners provide the land and classrooms, with financial contributions from UNICEF for building and teaching materials. (19,44) The program continued in 2022, and during the reporting period expanded to a total of 30 centers. (6,8)
Let's Get Ahead Program ( <i>Avancemos</i> )†	IMAS program that provides monthly conditional cash transfers to low-income families to keep children in school and out of exploitative work. (3,45) Reporting indicates that this program was active during the reporting period. (6)

For information about USDOL's projects to address child labor around the world, visit <https://www.dol.gov/agencies/ilab/ilab-project-page-search>

† Program is funded by the Government of Costa Rica.

‡ The government had other social programs that may have included the goal of eliminating or preventing child labor. (46-48)

## VII. SUGGESTED GOVERNMENT ACTIONS TO ELIMINATE CHILD LABOR

Based on the reporting above, suggested actions are identified that would advance the elimination of child labor in Costa Rica (Table 11).

**Table 11. Suggested Government Actions to Eliminate Child Labor**

Area	Suggested Action	Year(s) Suggested
Legal Framework	Ensure that the law criminally prohibits the recruitment of children under age 18 by non-state armed groups.	2016 – 2022
	Raise the minimum age for work from 15 to 17 to align with the compulsory education age.	2020 – 2022
Enforcement	Publish information on the number of child labor violations for which penalties were imposed and collected.	2017 – 2022
	Allocate sufficient resources to ensure routine labor inspections in rural areas and the informal sector, including child labor inspections, particularly in agriculture.	2015 – 2022
	Increase the number of labor inspectors from 105 to 167 to ensure adequate coverage for the labor force of approximately 2.5 million people.	2015 – 2022
	Ensure that the judiciary, prosecutors, municipal authorities, and the police have sufficient staff, training, and resources to investigate, prosecute, and convict perpetrators of human trafficking and commercial sexual exploitation of children, and identify victims of child trafficking and refer them to appropriate social services.	2017 – 2022
	Develop a mechanism to properly track human trafficking cases to improve enforcement and prevention efforts.	2019 – 2022
Coordination	Strengthen coordination and information sharing between institutions responsible for investigating child labor and providing social services to victims.	2015 – 2022
	Increase transportation and human resources for the Office for the Eradication of Child Labor and Protection of the Adolescent Worker so that the office can improve program oversight.	2015 – 2022
Social Programs	Enhance efforts to eliminate barriers and make education accessible for all children, including children in rural areas, girls, LGBTQI+ youth, children from indigenous and Afro-descendant communities, and migrant children.	2015 – 2022

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